

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) and the post-secondary landscape: Some wonders from an associate dean and former teacher-librarian

By Jennifer L. Branch-Mueller

Snapshot

Welcome to Professor Jennifer Branch-Mueller - our 2025 Reflections and Actions section guest. We are thrilled to have her write this section across 2025 and value her insight and commentary. Branch-Mueller's first article explores GenAI and the various benefits and concerns around its use in tertiary education and how emerging opportunities are there for secondary level teacher-librarians to take the lead.

I am currently serving as the Associate Dean, Academic and Student Experience in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada. I was a teacher and teacher-librarian and have been a professor for the past 25 years.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) is being talked about at every instructor meeting I attend. There are a lot of questions but not a lot of answers right now. Some of our instructors have a touch of technophobia and GenAI adds to their fear. There is also concern that our students are becoming too reliant on GenAI tools. In a recent meeting, we heard stories of students saying that if they are not using GenAI, they are falling behind because all the other students are using it. Instructors fear that students are becoming too reliant on AI tools (Rowse, 2025). My colleagues are worried about equity and privacy issues that come with GenAI use. As students turn to GenAI, how are we preparing them to think critically about the results that are generated?

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We are all on a steep learning curve with GenAI. What is the difference between ChatGPT and Grammarly for proofreading? What about the stories we have heard about GenAI creating fake references? How can GenAI tools support students and their learning? How are students using GenAI now and how might they use it in the future? At the University of Alberta, we have [created messaging for course outlines to help clarify how GenAI can be used in academic work](#). But putting these expectations on course outlines doesn't go far enough. We need to have sustained conversations with students about GenAI. We know that our students are using GenAI, so how can we help them use it ethically? Instructors are learning about AI Detectors but how can they be sure that those detectors actually work?

Resources have been created to help instructors with teaching and learning in the age of GenAI. Please see the references for more information. We have noticed an increase in 'contract

cheating' in the past several years. At the University of Alberta, we have ten times the number of academic integrity cases this year. And we know that this is just the tip of the iceberg as some instructors are not checking for GenAI use. Universities have created academic integrity tutorials to help students understand the broader implications of GenAI use for the academy. These

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can include disciplinary actions, professional conduct, erosion of trust between the instructor and the student, and challenges to the learning environment. Students may not consider how AI use can damage the value of their degree, program accreditation, and the reputation of the university (Flanagan, 2025). The burden of GenAI use seems to fall to the student to figure out the expectations in each individual course with each individual instructor. Perhaps, instead, instructors need to learn more about how students are using GenAI (Nagelhout, 2024).

Instructors are interested in how GenAI can and is impacting student learning. At the University of Alberta, we are using a ChatGPT Assistant in one of our large undergraduate courses to answer student questions (Bredberg, 2024). So far, the students are liking the real time answers they receive. Another colleague is researching the use of GenAI to provide immediate feedback on writing assignments submitted by students in our English Language School. Yet, instructors are worried about how GenAI is impacting students' ability to write. Concerning too is whether future students will lose the ability for sensemaking that happens through iterative writing tasks.

So what does this mean for teacher-librarians working in schools? This is an opportunity for you to take a leadership role by staying up-to-date with the latest GenAI developments. Talk to your teaching staff about the possibilities and pitfalls of AI use. Develop academic integrity policies that clarify GenAI use and share information with parents who may also be struggling to understand this new landscape. You can also support your teachers by helping calm fears and building understanding of how to use GenAI for learning. Offer to help develop assessment practices that support or limit GenAI use depending on the learning outcomes of the learning task.

Teacher-librarians have an important role to play in helping to prepare students for the world of GenAI. You can help students understand the implications of GenAI use for their own learning and skill development as well as what it means for the value of their high school and post-secondary qualifications. Providing equitable access to GenAI tools will help students develop the skills they need to support their own learning. In my own dealing with 'contract cheating' cases,

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many of the students used AI because they felt they had no other choice. They speak to the need for time management skills and effective approaches for writing papers and essays, and they bemoan their own lack of research and study skills. Teacher-librarians can provide workshops for students and advocate for these skills to be taught in the context of classroom assignments.

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Generative Artificial Intelligence offers benefits for many teachers and students. Teacher-librarians are well positioned to take a leadership role in their school communities to dispel fears, support understanding, develop skills for effective GenAI use while also continuing to teach research and study skills.

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